

TRACKS CAN BE A WASTING ASSET

by D.R. Lejeune.

This Department is responsible for approximately 17,000 miles of roads and tracks. About 10% of these are "arterial" or "sub arterial" roads. These were quite well constructed and are maintained to carry our heaviest traffic. The remaining 90% or 15,000 miles are commonly called "forest tracks" although few of them come near the now specified 12 ft. width. Unfortunately, it happens only too frequently that insufficient thought for their future life is given in their construction and subsequent maintenance.

An old foreman once told a forestry student, "Lad, there are three things to remember about roads, the first is drainage, the second is drainage and the third is drainage". On a steep grade one only has to observe a track which is not drained correctly to realize the wisdom of this statement. The track as such can disappear in a season.

Faulty drainage is something which tends to escape the active attention of many officers who see the tracks most frequently. Suddenly some one suggests re-construction.

To reconstruct our tracks as they are washed out beyond repair costs about £50 per mile. Thus if only 1% of these tracks require replacement each year, it would cost us £7,500 annually. Does this figure seem unreasonable?

We should bear in mind that all these tracks have been constructed in the last 40 years or so, and it would be nice to think of them as permanent. What percentage will require re-construction in 1970 or 1980?

Repair rather than reconstruction is economically out of the question for all but short sections. Construction costs 12/6d. per chain. For this amount you could only cart and spread 2 - 3 yards of gravel which would not have much effect and would be predisposed to washing away unless well mixed with soil.

It does not seem possible to prevent entirely the wasting of these assets, but there is a great deal we can do to arrest it simply by the use of well informed gradermen. The training of these men is not as easy as it may seem. You find that all officers instructing them will not give the same instructions in the same situation, and there are, even in the 20th century, men who believe that water will run up hill.

To me, the fundamental of grading from drainage is "Take the water off before it takes the soil off". Consider some of the damage done to our forest tracks, and I am sure you will agree that most of it is caused by failure to comply with this simple requirement.

Once we all agree on this and realize its importance we can progress to the details, viz. methods of grading in the various situations met in the field.

I shall not preach any further by inflicting you with my prescriptions for grading, but would be very interested to read yours in "Forest Notes".

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